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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the results of interviews with selected candidates in the educational administration program at the University of Nebraska, Omaha. The interviews, which were designed to investigate the benefits of a resource mentoring program, examined how respondents' relationships with their administrators had changed as a result of participating in the resource mentoring program; how often they met with their mentors; projects they worked on with their mentors; and how working with a resource mentor enhanced their educational administration program. Overall, respondents considered the program highly valuable, providing them with real-life experience in their chosen field, and they hoped it would continue. They supported the expansion of mentoring activities. Four out of six mentees mentioned a closer working relationship with their mentors as a result of the program. The frequency of mentoring meetings ranged from daily to bi-weekly. Mentor projects varied greatly and included a formal shadowing project, development of a web site, and coordinating a gifted and talented program. (SM)

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**Developing School Leaders Through Collaboration and Mentoring:
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**Anecdotal Responses Collected Through Interviews With
Selected Mentees In the Educational Administration Program**

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A Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the
American Association for Teacher Education

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Anecdotal Responses Collected Through Interviews With Selected Mentees In The Educational Administration Program

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to report the results of interviews conducted with selected candidates in the educational administration program at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. The intent of the interviews was to validate the benefits of a mentoring program as identified in a review of literature and in program goals. Interview questions were constructed around themes developed in the literature. Open ended questions utilized were intended to provide respondents opportunity to address how working with a resource mentor has not only complemented prescribed course work but more importantly how the relationship has provided real life practical experiences in educational leadership.

Review of Literature

The review of literature was centered on benefits of a mentoring experience as part of preparation programs for professional development. Particular emphasis was placed on mentoring programs beyond the traditional practicum experience at the conclusion of the program.

Leithwood, Jantzi, and Coffin (1995) stated that internships provide authentic experiences and foster real-life problem-solving skills, providing hands-on learning that cannot be gained by classroom study of theory and relevant information. Krueger and Milstein (1995) wrote that longer term internships benefit prospective school leaders, as do multiple clinical experiences and even multiple mentors.

Administrators who had been provided effective internship programs indicated that the experience provided them authentic job experience, that the experience connected theory and practice, and that they gained confidence according to Kraus and Cordeiro (1995).

Four benefits of the mentoring process were identified by PlayKo (1995). They included: increased confidence as a school administrator, increased networking with administrators, practical insights about the administrative job, and enhanced specialization to the new professional role.

A side benefit to the prospective administrator for future employability is the fact that local school districts have the opportunity to observe them in action (Hackmann, Russel, and Elliot, 1999).

Methodology

Interviewees were selected on the basis of experience with the resource mentor program. Those interviewed had a minimum of two semesters experience with the program. One individual interviewed has completed the masters level program in educational administration while all others are active candidates. Three different public school districts are represented by the interviewees. Interviews were conducted at the participants work site. Questions were not provided in advance. The five questions utilized were read to the respondents at the beginning of the interview. Each question was then asked of each candidate. The length of the interviews ranged from twenty to forty minutes. At the conclusion each interviewee was given an opportunity to make general comments regarding the program. Those responses were recorded as well.

Instrumentation

The following questions utilized for the interviews were developed by the author around themes found in the review of literature related to mentoring:

1. Describe how, if any, your relationship with your administrator has changed as a result of the resource mentor program?
2. How often have you met with your mentor?
3. Describe one or more projects you have worked on with your mentor.
4. How, if any, has working with a resource mentor enhanced your educational administration program?

5. What recommendations would you make to the educational administration department regarding the future of the resource mentor program?
6. Any other comments?

Participants

A total of six candidates for educational administration were selected for the interviews. For this study they will be referred to as mentees and will be referred to by letter as follows:

Mentee A - a female candidate who completed her program in December, 2000. She represented a large city school system and currently teaches at the middle school level. She worked with the building principal.

Mentee B - a male candidate who will complete his program in May, 2001. He represents a large suburban school district and currently teaches at the elementary level. He works with the building principal.

Mentee C - a male candidate who will complete his program in August, 2001. He represents a large city school system and currently teaches at the high school level. He works with an assistant principal.

Mentee D - a female candidate who hopes to complete her program in December, 2001. She is an elementary resource teacher with a large suburban school district. She works with the building principal.

Mentee E - a female candidate who hopes to complete her program in May, 2002. She is an elementary teacher in a large suburban school district. She works with the building principal.

Mentee F - a male candidate who hopes to complete his program in August, 2002. He is a high school teacher in a large suburban school district. He works with an assistant principal.

Each candidate had the opportunity to work with a mentor for a minimum of two of their required courses. Those still in the program will work with their mentor in each of their remaining courses.

Results

This section will be organized by the sequence of interview questions. Responses to the open ended questions sometimes better fit questions asked later. The author has attempted to best match responses with the questions asked.

Question 1 - Describe how, if any, your relationship with your administrator has changed as a result of the resource mentor program?

Four of the six mentees mentioned a closer working relationship with their mentor. Mentee F indicated that an adversarial relationship has become positive. Three mentees stated that a higher level of trust is now evident. Four of the mentees mentioned that the relationship has led to new and welcome responsibilities for leadership. Mentee F feels that he is now perceived as a coworker by his mentor. Mentees A, D, and E believe that they have a stronger appreciation for the building leaders as a result of shadowing experiences arranged by their mentors. Mentee E specifically stated that she now understands how a building leader sets high expectations and insists that staff work hard to meet them.

Question 2 - How often have you met with your mentor?

The number of meetings ranged from daily to every two weeks. Mentees C, E, and F reported daily meetings. In those three cases the mentor updates the mentee on issues he / she is dealing with. Mentee D likewise reported daily meetings during the 1999 - 2000 school year when she was working with a resource mentor who has since been promoted to the district offices. She reports that currently she meets with her mentor every other week on a more formal basis. The mentor is open to other informal meetings but does not seek out the mentee. Mentee F stated that his mentor updates him on building issues at least twice daily and that they spend a minimum of fifteen minutes daily together. All mentees reported more regular meetings of greater length during times they were working on specific projects required for the mentee's university courses.

E indicated that e - mail was utilized regularly with her mentor. Mentee B reported that he met with his mentor weekly on a regular basis.

Question 3: Describe one or more projects you have worked on with your mentor.

Responses to this item varied greatly. Three mentees reported a formal shadowing project with their mentor. Mentee A requested an opportunity to work with her mentor on developing the building budget. In addition, she coordinated a school improvement project specifically aimed at improving test scores.

Mentee B worked with his mentor to develop a web site for their school. In addition he assisted the mentor in routine administrative duties such as attendance reporting.

Mentee C worked with the assistant principal to develop an annual open house night, helped to create a plan for celebrating the Martin Luther King birthday, and has been working with his mentor to improve the in school suspension program to reduce time student are out of classes. During the current semester Mentee C has been provided release time to assist the assistant principal in dealing with student management.

Mentee D has coordinated the gifted and talented program at her school with the supervision of the mentor. She has helped to plan and conduct faculty meetings and has been included with the mentor in planning the calendar for the building.

Mentee E is involved daily in projects with the mentor. Examples include: heading up the school improvement plan, coordinating parent teacher organization activities, serving as the student assistance program leader, helping to analyze and report achievement test results, and coordinating the high ability learner program.

Mentee F has worked with his mentor to develop a web site for the building and is currently working with his mentor to develop the daily schedule for next year. Mentee F reports that his mentor informs him daily of issues the administration is dealing with and that this has been a valuable experience. The greatest hindrance to more involvement is time and that a full teaching load makes it difficult to work together more.

Question 4 - How, if any, has working with a resource mentor enhanced your educational administration program?

All mentees reported that the experience has provided them real life experience

in their chosen field. They find that the experience has demonstrated to them what an educational administrator does. Mentee C says that "the experience has opened my eyes and I will be prepared to do the job". Mentee E indicates that the experience has been professionally motivating to her. Mentee F states that his course work has provided the data and information needed to do the job but that the mentor has provided the practical side of the experience. Mentee B believes that the experience has illustrated the need to be organized.

Question 5 - What recommendations would you make to the educational administration department regarding the future of the resource mentor program?

All mentees believe that the program needs to continue. Mentees B, C, and E indicate that the program needs to be expanded. Mentees A and D recommend that consideration be given to multiple mentors so mentees could observe different leadership styles. Several mentees comment about the difficulty of finding time to work extensively with their mentor. Mentee B states that every course in the program should require projects working with the mentor. Several mentees suggest that more time be built in for shadowing experiences. Mentee finds the program valuable but recommends that critical administrative skills be identified and that mentee activities be built around those skills. Mentee E believes that the department needs to identify knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for successful mentors. She reports that her experience has been great but believes much of that is due to an outstanding mentor.

Question 6 - Any other comments?

"I like the idea, mentoring is important at all levels." "The program is very helpful." "I like the program - very worthwhile - it has provided a good tie for me between course work and the real world." "Without a doubt, the mentoring program has led to an opportunity to serve as an intern in my district for the next two years." "The experience has opened the door to additional leadership responsibility for me in my building." These were responses of the mentees.

Conclusions

The responses of mentees indicate that they find the program highly valuable. All encourage continuation. Support is evident for expansion of the activities with a mentor. Issues needing to be addressed include: should multiple mentors be utilized; how can time be arranged to enhance the program; what knowledge, skills, and dispositions are necessary for mentors; and should mentor/mentee experiences be built around critical skills rather than courses. This anecdotal information along with information gathered from the review of literature and the research data collected will help the department to incorporate the resource mentor program into future planning.

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